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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PINR](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: TURKEY'S NEW CHOD: GENERAL ILKER BASBUG

REF: A. ANKARA 1167
[1](#)B. ANKARA 1091
[1](#)C. 05 ANKARA 607

Classified By: Ambassador Ross Wilson, Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary and comment: Turkish Land Forces Commander General Ilker Basbug (pronounced BAHSH-boo) was named as Turkey's next CHOD at the Turkey's Supreme Military Council (YAS) that concluded on August 4 (full YAS results reported septel). Despite some shifts in civil-military relations, the CHOD is still one of Turkey's top policymakers. A regular embassy contact since 2003 when he served as the Deputy CHOD, Basbug is favorably disposed to the U.S. In his capacity as DCHOD, Basbug was instrumental in overcoming strained bilateral mil-to-mil relations in the aftermath of the March 1, 2003 vote and the July 4, 2003 "hooding incident." The change of leadership at TGS is unlikely to lead to any significant policy shifts at TGS. Basbug appears to understand the struggle against the PKK cannot be won by military means alone and has expressed support for the government's initiative to begin Kurdish language broadcasts on state-run stations. While Basbug is a committed secularist, media reporting suggests he is philosophically opposed to military intervention in politics, a view reportedly shaped by the events during and following the 1960 coup, when he was still a cadet in the military academy. Basbug's "secret" meeting with a Constitutional Court judge days before the filing of the closure case against the AKP (ref a) suggests he might have had prior knowledge of the case and provided at least tacit approval of it. Having someone with Basbug's experience and understanding of the U.S. and NATO as the CHOD should be beneficial for overall bilateral relations. End Summary and comment.

A Superior Officer

[1](#)2. (SBU) GEN Ilker Basbug is widely respected within the military and has been an important contact of the embassy since 2003, when he became Deputy Chief of the General Staff. The son of migrants from Macedonia, like his predecessor GEN Buyukanit, Basbug excelled in key assignments within TGS (DCHOD), Land Forces Command (Land Forces Chief of Staff, Commander of First Army, Land Forces Commander), NATO (Chief of Logistics at SHAPE), and Turkey's National Security Council (Deputy President of the Secretariat). Contacts who have worked with and for Basbug said he is a good manager and

contrasted Basbug's willingness to trust his staff with Buyukanit's reputation of relying on only a very select circle of advisers. Thoughtful, direct and pragmatic, Basbug has a realpolitik view of the world, emphasizing shared interests more than shared values as the basis for international cooperation. He is well-read and has excellent recall of detail and factual information pertaining to his brief.

Extensive Experience at NATO, in West

13. (SBU) A fluent English speaker, Basbug has extensive experience in the west. He attended the British Royal Military Academy as a major. He served in Belgium three times: first as an intelligence planning officer at NATO, then as a department head for logistics and infrastructure at SHAPE, and finally as the senior Turkish National Military Representative at SHAPE from 1993 to 1995. He also graduated from the NATO Defense College in Rome.

Maintained Relations During Troubled Times

14. (C) During his tenure as DCHOD from 2003 to 2005, Basbug was at the forefront of TGS efforts to restore mil-to-mil relations following the March 1, 2003 vote (when the Turkish parliament failed to obtain enough votes to grant passage of U.S. troops to open a northern front against Iraq) and the July 4, 2003 hooding incident (when U.S. forces detained and hooded Turkish special forces in Suleymaniye, Iraq). In a January 26, 2005 press conference, Basbug highlighted the breadth and importance of the Turkish-American relationship, which set the tone for subsequent statements by the military, the bureaucracy and the government that helped put U.S.-Turkish relations back on track. Basbug was also instrumental in the establishment of the cargo hub at Incirlik in 2005, and was a proponent for resuming the annual High-Level Defense Group meeting in 2005 following a hiatus.

15. (C) Basbug's positive disposition toward the U.S. notwithstanding, we expect policy differences on security and defense matters to remain. The TGS will continue to take a hard line with the Kurdistan Regional government on the PKK and will carefully monitor developments in Kirkuk. The Turkish military will continue to support NATO efforts in Afghanistan, but remain unwilling to seek a change in Turkey's caveats on the use of its forces in Afghanistan or put combat troops into the south and east. It will continue to be suspicious of U.S. efforts to play a more active role in Black Sea security and will react strongly to Armenian genocide resolutions. Contacts agree that the Turkish military's policy positions rarely change. One retired two-star army officer likened TGS to a mountain: "The snow changes at the top from time to time, but the mountain itself will not change."

Views on PKK

16. (S) Basbug has a realistic and pragmatic understanding of the PKK challenge. As Land Forces Commander, Basbug reaffirmed Buyukanit's acknowledgment that the ultimate solution to the PKK problem is not a military one. Under Basbug's leadership, the Turkish Land Forces have reportedly made efforts to reach out to parents of those who joined the PKK, urging them to convince their children to quit the organization. In June 2008, he publicly expressed support for a government initiative to begin Kurdish language programming on state-run television to counter the influence of ROJ TV (ref b). Although he strongly pressed the U.S. to take action against the PKK throughout his tenure as DCHOD, he also showed an appreciation for the multidimensional nature of our bilateral military relationship, acknowledging that the relationship between the U.S. and Turkey is "long-lasting and comprehensive" and that it is "not wise to tie our relationship to one problem (PKK). We can disagree in

some areas." (ref c).

Harder Views on Cyprus

¶17. (C) During a April 2008 visit to the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus," Basbug said in his public remarks, "There must be a comprehensive, fair, and lasting solution under the roof of the UN. The Cyprus issue is dependent on two basic principles. One of them is our responsibility to ensure security of Turkish Cypriots, and the other is that Cyprus has a strategic role in regard to Turkey's security." This tough stance echoes the position he consistently took on Cyprus during his tenure as DCHOD.

Views on Iran

¶18. (C) In June, Basbug raised eyebrows when he publicly acknowledged that Turkish forces have coordinated anti-PKK actions with Iran. We do not believe this indicates any positive feelings on the part of Basbug for Iran, but rather a simple statement regarding on-going coordination along the Turkey-Iran border to stem terrorists crossings, narcotics trafficking and other smuggling. He has expressed concern, as have many other senior TGS officials, about the threat Iran possess to Turkey. In his remarks at the American-Turkish Council conference in 2005, Basbug made clear, "Turkey can never welcome an Iran who possesses nuclear weapons."

Views on Civilian-Military Relations

¶19. (C) The 1960 military coup took place shortly before Basbug reported to the Turkish Military Academy in Ankara as a new cadet, and reportedly left a deep impression on him. A purge within the ranks of the military following the coup led to the dismissal of over 5000 officers, including 235 of 260 flag officers. Even the cadets at the Academy experienced the deep rifts within the military following the coup. Basbug's class was told to go home until further notice on February 22, 1961, after the commander of the academy was sacked for opposing the restoration of civilian authority. When Basbug returned to the academy, there was a change in leadership and curriculum. The experience, according to retired Major General Riza Kucukoglu, a friend of Basbug since high school, led the cadets in Basbug's cohort to abhor military intervention in politics; it was "almost like a phobia."

¶10. (C) However, Basbug has spoken forcefully of the military's role to defend Turkey's secular identity. At a September 2006 speech to military academy cadets, he said, "The Turkish Armed Forces have always defended and will continue to defend the nation state, the unitary state, and the secular state." In the same speech, he also warned of the rising influence of "anti-secular forces." Basbug's "secret meeting" with Constitutional Court Justice Paksut on March 4 (ref a), just days before the chief prosecutor filed the closure case against the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), suggests that he might have been given foreknowledge of the case, and at least tacitly approved of it.

Personal Information

¶11. (U) GEN Basbug is married to Sevil Basbug and they have two children. His son Murat is pursuing a master's degree in the U.S. Basbug is reportedly an aficionado of classical music. He does not smoke. Acquaintances describe him as a social drinker. He was born in Afyon in 1943, and graduated from the same high school as two presidents (Demirel and Sezer), and a CHOD (Ismail Hakki Karadagi).

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